

African Americans and Latinos in the United States

Key Words

African American, Latino, Coalition, Poverty, Prison, Health Care Access

Abstract

This issue brief explores some of the major issues that affect both the African American and Latino populations in the United States, including poverty, mass incarceration, and limited access to health care. This brief also discusses the notable absence of a strong coalition between these two groups

Key Points

- Historically, African Americans and Latinos have been discriminated against as racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, respectively
- The “racial poverty gap” affects both the African American and Latino communities
 - African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately represented among the urban poor
 - The unemployment rates for African Americans and Latinos are the highest in the nation
- The African American and Latino populations are grossly overrepresented in U.S. prisons
- African Americans and Latinos face disparities in access to health care

Issue Brief

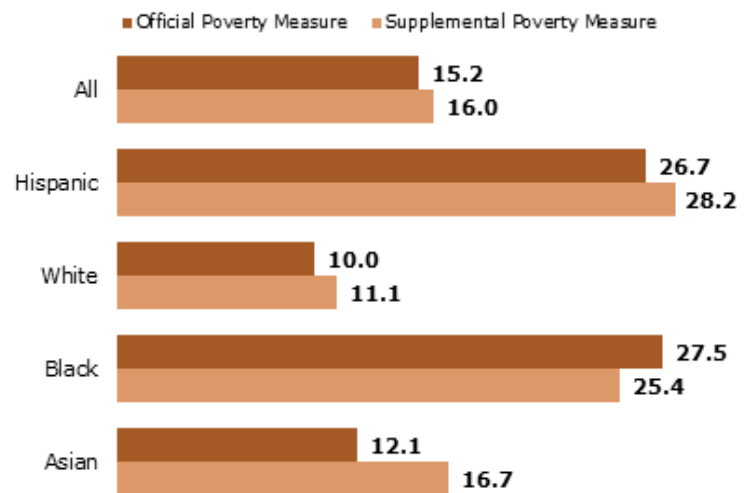
According to the 2000 U.S. Census, African Americans constitute about 12% of the population while Latinos—the fastest growing ethnoracial minority in the United States—make up about 16% of the population. Historically, African Americans were racialized as “black” and denied access to the privileges that citizenship offered “white” European settlers.¹ Conversely, Latinos were historically racialized as “white,” yet also denied access to the protections of full citizenship in American society.² The complicated history of racialization in the United States is apparent in the most recent census, which categorizes Latinos as a non-racial “ethnic group.” As such, Latinos benefit from policies geared toward leveling the playing field for racial minorities (such as affirmative action) yet tend to self-identify as distinct from these groups. Due to this disconnect, Latinos are less likely to agree with African Americans’ perceptions of racial discrimination in applying for jobs, colleges or loans (Pew). The lack of solidarity between African Americans and Latinos is counterproductive given the nature of the issues these two groups face.

¹ See the U.S. Constitution of 1789 (Article I Section 2 Clause 3; Article IV Section 2 Clause 3) as well as the Naturalization Act of 1790 (which limits eligibility for citizenship to “free, white persons”)

² See the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo which ended the Spanish American War and ceded millions of acres of Mexican territory to the United States

Both African Americans and Latinos are affected by the “racial poverty gap,” which is the wealth distribution disparity between the white racial majority and the non-white minority. In 2010, the poverty rates for African Americans and Latinos were nearly triple that of their white counterparts (Gradin). Especially in urban areas, poverty, educational attainment, and employment are directly correlated. Given this fact, it is unsurprising that African American “ghettos” and Latino “barrios” offer the least access to quality health care, educational facilities and job opportunities (Elliot). In 2012, the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that the unemployment rates for African Americans and Latinos were significantly higher than those of the rest of the population. From this, it is clear that African Americans and Latinos similarly face poor economic prospects and were the two groups most negatively affected by the economic recession.

Figure 1
Comparing the Official and Supplemental Poverty Measures, 2010
% of population in poverty



Notes: Whites include only non-Hispanic whites. Blacks and Asians include both Hispanic and non-Hispanic components of those populations.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, [Short \(2011\)](http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/supplemental/research.html). For more information on the Census Bureau's supplemental poverty measure see <http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/supplemental/research.html>.

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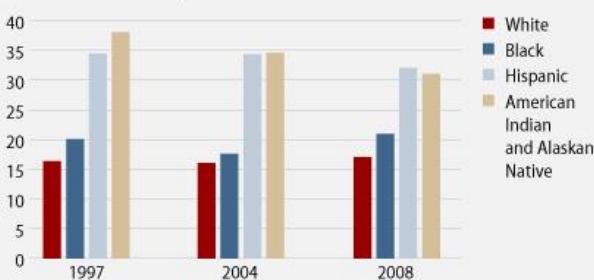
Despite accounting for just 28% of the U.S.

Source: Pew Research Center

population, African Americans and Latinos constitute about 58% of the total U.S. prison population (NAACP). Studies have shown that African Americans and Latinos are more likely to be incarcerated and to face harsher sentences compared to white Americans. Given the nature of incarceration in the United States, these populations are overrepresented in the prison-industrial workforce, and have the most difficulty obtaining a job post-emancipation. In addition, African American and Latino youth make up about 13% of the youth population, yet 58% of youths in prison are of African American or Latino descent (NAACP). Incarceration reinforces the cycle of the racial poverty gap, which keeps African Americans and Latinos in the lower quartile of the United States socioeconomic distribution.

FIGURE 1

Percentage of population under 65 without insurance by race and ethnicity



Source: Center for American Progress

African Americans and Latinos face disparities in access to healthcare in the United States. Health care accessibility can be defined by a number of factors from the number of health care institutions in a specific area, to the quality of specific institutions' facilities, to the availability of insurance programs. According to the Center for American Progress, African Americans and Latinos have among the largest populations of uninsured individuals. Furthermore, the health care disparities that

Latinos and African Americans face largely result from living in substandard conditions well below the poverty line (CDC). The lack of accessibility to health particularly alarming given that these populations represent the 48% of the population affected by AIDS (Huffington Post).

It is clear that African Americans and Latinos face some of the same issues in the United States, including high rates of poverty especially in urban areas, overrepresentation in the prison system and low access to health care. It is clear that these two populations would benefit from a coalition with one another to address the issues that negatively impact the African American and Latino communities. The first step toward building such a coalition is overcoming the historical differences in the racialization of African Americans and Latinos to build a sense of solidarity between the two populations.

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